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The CALL of the CUMBERLANDS

BY CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF SCENES IN THE PLAY

CHAPTER XI

One afternoon, swinging along Fifth avenue in his down-town walk, Samson met Mr. Farish, who fell into step with him, and began to make conversation.

"By the way, South," he suggested after the commonplaces had been disposed of, "you'll pardon my little prevarication the other evening about having met you at the Manhattan club?"

"Why was it necessary?" inquired Samson, with a glance of disquieting directness.

"Possibly, it was not necessary, merely polite. Of course," he laughed, "every man knows two kinds of women. It's just as well not to discuss the nectarines with the orchids, or the orchids with the nectarines."

Samson made no response. But Farish, meeting his eyes, felt as though he had been contemptuously rubbed. His own eyes clouded with an impulse of resentment. But it passed, as he remembered that his plans involved the necessity of winning this boy's consent.

At the steps of a Fifth avenue club, Farish halted.

"Won't you turn in here," he suggested, "and assuage your thirst?"

Samson declined, and walked on. But when, a day or two later, he dropped into the same club with George Lescott, Farish joined them in the grill—without invitation.

"By the way, Lescott," said the interloper, with an easy assurance upon which the coolness of his reception had no seeming effect, "it won't be long now until ducks are flying south. Will you get off for your customary shooting?"

"I'm afraid not," Lescott's voice became more cordial, as a man's will, whose hobby has been touched, "there are several canvases to finish. I wish I could go. When the first cold winds begin to sweep down, I get the fever. The prospects are good, too, I understand."

"The best in years! Protection in the Canadian breeding fields is bearing fruit. Do you shoot ducks, Mr. South?" The speaker included Samson as though merely out of deference to his physical presence.

Samson shook his head. But he was listening eagerly. He too knew that note of the migratory "honk" from high overhead.

"Samson," said Lescott slowly, as he caught the gleam in his friend's eyes, "you've been working too hard. You'll have to take a week off, and try your hand. After you've changed your mind."

He worked feverishly, and threw into his work such fire and energy that it came out again converted into boldness of stroke and an almost savage vigor of drawing. The instructor nodded his head over the easel, and passed on to the next student without having left the defacing mark of his relentless crayon. To the next pupil, he said:

"Watch the way that man South draws. He's not clever. He's elementally inept. And he goes on, the first thing you know he will be a portrait painter. He won't merely draw eyes and lips and noses, but character and virtues and vices showing out through them."

And Samson met every gaze with smouldering savagery, searching for some one who might be listening at him openly, or even covertly, instead of behind his back. The long-suffering fighting list in him craved opportunity to break out and relieve the pressure on his soul. But no one laughed.

One afternoon late in November, a hint of blizzard was swirling down from the Atlantic seaboard from the polar flocks, with wet flurries of snow and rain. Off on the marshes where the Kenmore club had its lodge, the live decoys stretched their clipped wings and raised their green necks restively into the salt wind, and listened. With dawn, they had heard, faint and far away, the first notes of that wild chorus with which the skies would ring until the southerly migrations ended—the horizon-distinct honking of high flying water fowl.

Then it was that Farish dropped in with marching orders, and Samson, yearning to be away where there were open skies, packed George Lescott's borrowed paraphernalia and prepared to leave that same night.

While he was packing the telephone rang, and Samson heard Adrienne's voice at the other end of the wire.

"Where have you been hiding?" she demanded. "I'll have to send a truant officer after you."

"I've been very busy," said the man, "and I reckon, after all, you can't civilize a wild man. I'm afraid I've been wasting your time."

Possibly the miserable tone of the voice told the girl more than the words.

"You are having a season with the blue devils," she announced. "You've been cooped up too much. This wild ought to bring the ducks, and—"

"I'm leaving tonight," Samson told her.

"It would have been very nice of you to have run up to say good-by," she reproved. "But I'll forgive you, if you call me up by long distance tomorrow. I'm going to Philadelphia over night. The next night, I shall be at the theatre. Call me up after the theatre, and tell me how you like it."

It was the same old frankness and friendliness of voice and the same old note like the music of a reed instrument. Samson felt so comforted and reassured that he laughed through the telephone.

"I've been keeping away from you,"

he volunteered, "because I've had a lapse into savagery, and haven't been fit to talk to you. When I get back, I'm coming up to explain. And, in the meantime, I'll telephone."

On the train Samson was surprised to discover that, after all, he had Mr. William Farish for a traveling companion. That gentleman explained that he had found an opportunity to ply truant from business for a day or two, and wished to see Samson comfortably escorted and introduced.

The first day Farish and Samson had the place to themselves, but the next morning would bring others.

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And yet, as is often the case in carefully designed affairs, the one element that made most powerfully for the success of Farish's scheme was pure accident. The carefully arranged meeting between the two men, the adroitly incited passions of each, would still have brought no clash, had not Wilfred Horton been affected by the usual effect of alcohol. Since his college days, he had been invariably abstemious. Tonight marked an exception.

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In point of fact, Wilfred Horton had spent a very bad day. The final straw had broken the back of his usually unruffled temper, when he had found in his room on reaching the Kenmore a copy of a certain New York weekly paper, and had read a page, which he had been told was a (chance carefully prearranged). It was an item of which Farish had known, in advance of publication, but Wilfred would never have seen the sheet, had it not been so carefully brought to him. There were hints of the strange infatuation which a certain young woman seemed to entertain for a partially civilized stranger who had made his entire New York via the police court, and who wore his hair long in imitation of a biblical character of the same name. The supper at the Wigwam inn was mentioned, and the character of the place intimated. Horton felt this objectionable innuendo was directly traceable to Adrienne's ill-judged friendship for the mountaineer, and he bitterly blamed her for it.

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